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The CIA Should Guard Its Secrets

There is more than a modicum of right-of-concern in increased fears that too many of this nation's intelligence secrets are becoming subjects of public scrutiny. But if the unhappy circumstances are to be altered, the impetus will have to come more from the Central Intelligence Agency and the administration than from anywhere else.

Bertram B. Johansson, Latin America editor of The Christian Science Monitor, looked into U.S. "security leaks" recently and found a not-too-bright picture. Pointing to England's tight control of its intelligence affairs, Mr. Johansson notes:

"In the United States, the procedure is quite different . . . Not only is Congress exerting its prerogative of raising questions about whether there should not be a 'constant review of our intelligence operations,' but 'leaks' of numerous kinds of intelligence information are coming from civilians in Atlanta, in Oklahoma, in New York City, and the 'leaks,' in turn, are being exploited to the full by some congressmen who insist that the American people 'have a right to know.'"

Rep. George H. Mahon (D., Tex.) looks askance at the results. Excessive talk about United States intelligence secrets, he said, is "making us the laughing stock of the world."

The American people, of course, do "have a right to know." But the American

people have not raised any great outcry for a mass unveiling of intelligence secrets. It was unnecessary.

Going back in time, the first recent "breach" came from the White House, when President Eisenhower decided to bare the CIA's breast by admitting full responsibility for the abortive flight over Russia of U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers.

Some contend this was necessary because the State Department was caught with its "cover story" on the U-2 affair sadly lacking in veracity. But was it necessary to say anything at all? Would not silence have been the wiser course?

Then came the Bay of Pigs fiasco, directed by the CIA. The fact the CIA was involved in this sad excuse for an invasion of Cuba apparently was not a very well kept secret. And if the CIA is to be an overt arm of U.S. foreign policy, then its activities indeed are subject to public scrutiny.

In sum, it is unfortunate that two administrations in succession have become involved in affairs which readily lent themselves to an unveiling of intelligence secrets. Even more unfortunate, the CIA, charged with guarding the secrets of this nation, charged with espionage and counter-espionage, has proved itself rather inept at protecting its own security.